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Insurers donate money to Nevada fire council

BY JEFF DELONG • JDELONG@RGJ.COM • SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

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Acknowledging they have a vested interest, insurers on Monday offered a cash donation to support a grass-roots effort to respond to fire danger in Nevada.

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Representatives of Farmers Insurance Group donated \$2,500 to the Nevada Fire Safe Council and challenged other private companies to support the group.

"We're hoping our contribution will really help to heighten awareness," said Stephen Brown, Nevada executive director for Farmers Insurance.

The donation builds on similar ones made last year by State Farm Insurance and the Nevada Insurance Council, said Andrew List, executive director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

The council's first chapter was formed in February 2002 and last month added its 100th community, a west Reno neighborhood.

The group, using volunteers in each of its neighborhoods, works with local, state and federal fire agencies to create defensible space around homes, build fire breaks to protect neighborhoods near forested areas and educate the public regarding wildfire issues.

Nevada has had a mild wildfire season, with 432 fires burning 70,764 acres. Last year, about 895,000 acres in Nevada had burned by this time.

Just across the state line, a particularly destructive fire in June 2007 destroyed 254 homes near South Lake Tahoe.

Farmers Insurance handled hundreds of claims associated with that fire and faces the same prospect every year, Brown said, adding his company insures about 20 percent of the homes in Nevada.

"Money's tough to come by," he said. "Private industry giving financial contributions is now more important than ever."

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